

Message Text

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12

ACTION EA-06

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P R 171051Z JAN 75

FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9917

INFO AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH

AMEMBASSY SAIGON

AMEMBASSY TOKYO

AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

USDEL JEC PARIS

USLO PEKING

C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 0939

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, TH, VN

SUBJECT: THAI-NORTH VIETNAMESE RELATIONS

REF: A. FBIS S030520Z DEC 74 VIETNAMESE VERSION; B.
FBIS D030839Z DEC. 74 ENGLISH TEXT; C. BANGKOK 356; D. FBIS
BK 061549Z JAN 75; E. SAIGON 15011; F. BANGKOK 19146; G.
BANGKOK 19518; H. FBIS BK 170238Z JAN 75

SUMMARY: THE THAI VIEW THEIR RESPONSE TO THE DRV FOREIGN
MINISTER'S LETTER AS A NECESSARY TIT-FOR-TAT PROPAGANDA EXERCISE.
THEY DO NOT, HOWEVER, RULE OUT MORE CONCILIATORY SECRET DIPLOMACY
MODELED ON THE U.S. EXPERIENCE WITH THE NORTH VIETNAMESE IN
PARIS. WE FORESEE NO EARLY BREAKTHROUGHS IN EITHER CHANNEL.
END SUMMARY.

BACKGROUND: DRV FOREIGN MINISTER NGUYEN DUY TRINH SENT A
LETTER TO THAI FOREIGN MINISTER CHARUNPHAN ITSARANGKUN NA
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AYUTTHAYA ON 27 NOVEMBER 1974 AND BROADCAST THE TEXT ALMOST

IMMEDIATELY THEREAFTER ON RADIO HANOI (REFS A AND B). CHARUNPHAN REPLIED ON DECEMBER 26 (REF C), BUT WAITED SOMEWHAT LONGER TO DIVULGE HIS TEXT. THE DRV HAS SINCE REACTED QUITE SHARPLY TO THE THAI LETTER (REF D).

1. THE THAI RESPONSE: AS EMBASSY SAIGON HAS ALREADY ANALYZED THE TRINH LETTER (REF E), WE WILL CONFINE OUR COMMENT TO THE THAI RESPONSE AND WHAT WE KNOW OF THE THINKING THAT SHAPED IT. REFS F AND G CONTAIN THE INITIAL RTG REACTION TO THE EFFECT THAT THE TRINH LETTER WAS A PROPAGANDA GESTURE THAT THE THAI SHOULD ANSWER IN THE SAME SPIRIT. THE ACTUAL LETTER, HOWEVER, IS GRACIOUS IN FORM, BUT UNYIELDING IN SUBSTANCE. WHEREAS THE TRINH LETTER MAKES REPEATED REFERENCES TO U.S. MILITARY ACTIVITY IN SOUTHEAST ASIA, THE THAI LETTER AVOIDS ALL DIRECT REFERENCE TO U.S. TROOPS. INSTEAD IT RECOUNTS THE REFUGE THE THAI GAVE TO THE PEOPLES OF INDOCHINA DURING THE LATTER'S STRUGGLE AGAINST THE FRENCH, BUT THEN PROMPTLY DISTINGUISHES BETWEEN THE ANTI-COLONIAL STRUGGLE AND NORTH VIETNAM'S POLICY OF LIBERATION THROUGH DRV DOMINATION.

2. NEITHER DOES CHARUNPHAN LET PASS UNANSWERED THE DRV ALLEGATION THAT "NO INDOCHINESE COUNTRY HAS SENT TROOPS TO WAGE WAR ON THAI TERRITORY..." ON THE CONTRARY, HE RECOUNTS THAT "... WE HAVE FOUND OURSELVES THE OBJECT OF TERRORISM AND SUBVERSION INSTIGATED FROM OUTSIDE AS WELL AS SUBJECTED TO DAILY VITUPERATIVE PROPAGANDA..." CHARUNPHAN GOES ON TO CHRONICLE THAI CONCERN AND ALARM OVER NORTH VIETNAMESE EFFORTS TO GAIN HEGEMONY IN LAOS AND CAMBODIA, NOTING THAT THIS POSTURE AFFECTS THE SECURITY OF THAILAND. HE THEN POINTS OUT THAT THE MEASURES THE RTG HAS ADOPTED (THE PRESENCE OF U.S. MILITARY FORCES IN THAILAND) "HAVE NEVER BEEN GEARED TOWARDS THE DESTRUCTION OF THE SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT OF ANY COUNTRY."

3. CHARUNPHAN'S KEY CHALLENGE TO THE NORTH VIETNAMESE IS TO LET BYGONES BE BYGONES AND LOOK TO THE FUTURE OF THEIR BILATERAL RELATIONS

WITH A FRESH EYE. HE THEN GOES ON TO OFFER HIS OWN DEMANDS THAT THE NORTH VIETNAMESE CEASE SUPPORT FOR THE INSURGENCY IN THAILAND AND THAT THE DRV JOIN THAILAND IN INSURING THE INDEPENDENCE, SOVEREIGNTY, NEUTRALITY, AND TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY OF LAOS
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AND CAMBODIA.

4. THE RTG ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE EXCHANGE: A SENIOR MFA OFFICIAL WHO PARTICIPATED IN THE FORMULATION OF CHARUNPHAN'S LETTER TOLD THE POLITICAL COUNSELOR THAT THE THAI VIEWED THE TRINH LETTER AS A PROPAGANDA PLOY THAT REQUIRED A STRONG RESPONSE. HE MENTIONED THAT SECRETARY KISSINGER HAD ADVISED THE THAI THAT THE ONLY WAY TO DEAL WITH THE NORTH VIETNAMESE WAS WITH STRENGTH.

THE MEMORY OF THIS ADVICE APPARENTLY STUCK, AND INFLUENCED THAI THINKING.

5. OTHER DETAILS OF THE U.S. NEGOTIATING EXPERIENCE WITH THE DRV HAVE ALSO IMPRESSED THE THAI. FIRST TO US AND LATER IN AN OFF-THE-RECORD COMMENT TO THE LOCAL PRESS, MFA SPOKESMAN PRACHA KUNAKASEM REMARKED THAT THE HARSHNESS OF THE THAI PUBLIC RESPONSE TO TRINH DID NOT PRECLUDE MORE CONCILIATORY PRIVATE AND SECRET INITIATIVES TO REACH A MODUS VIVENDI WITH THE DRV.

6. THE DRV FOREIGN MINISTRY'S STATEMENT (REF D) ON CHARUNPHAN'S ANSWER WAS DERISIVELY STRIDENT IN ITS CRITICISM, THIS REPORT APPEARS TO SET PUBLIC THAI-NORTH VIETNAMESE RELATIONS BACK TO SQUARE ONE. THE RTG REMAINS UNDAUNTED, HOWEVER, AND CONTINUES TO EXPECT TO PURSUE SECRET INITIATIVES WHILE BOTH SIDES EXCHANGE PUBLIC BRICKBATS.

7. THANAT GETS IN THE ACT: AN INTERESTING SIDE SHOW TO THIS RECENT EXCHANGE IS AN ARTICLE IN THE "BANGKOK POST" OF JANUARY 17 REPORTING A BBC INTERVIEW WITH BITTER OLD STATES-MAN THANAT KHOMAN (REF H). THANAT CLAIMS THAT PRIME MINISTER SANYA SENT HIM TO EUROPE SOMETIME DURING 1974 TO MAKE A SECRET PEACE INITIATIVE WITH THE NORTH VIETNAMESE, BUT THAT THE THAI NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL BALKED AT ALLOWING ANY FOLLOW-UP. THANAT SAID HE COULD REOPEN HIS INITIATIVE ANY TIME THE RTG WANTED. WHATEVER THE TRUTH TO THANAT'S STORY, IT ILLUSTRATES THANAT'S INABILITY TO LET THAI FOREIGN AFFAIRS GO ON WITHOUT HIM.

8. COMMENT: WE DOUBT THAT ANY PUBLIC GESTURES OF MUTUAL CONCILIATION ARE IN THE OFFING. NOR DO WE BELIEVE THAT THE THAI WILL BE ABLE TO ACHIEVE ANY TANGIBLE RESULTS QUICKLY IN CONFIDENTIAL

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WHATEVER PRIVATE CHANNELS THEY CHOOSE TO EMPLOY. THE MAJOR STICKING POINTS ARE AND WILL REMAIN THE BELLICOSE NORTH VIETNAMESE POSTURE IN INDOCHINA, CONTINUED DRV SUPPORT FOR THE THAI INSURGENTS, AND THE U.S. MILITARY PRESENCE IN THAILAND. WHILE THE THAI MAY EXPLORE THE POSSIBILITIES OF TRADING OFF SOME ASPECTS OF OUR PRESENCE AS BARGAINING CHIPS TO IMPROVE THE DRV ATTITUDE, THE RTG REMAINS AWARE OF THE GREATER EAST WITH WHICH THE NORTH VIETNAMESE COULD RENEGE ON THEIR HALF OF THE BARGAIN.
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